

Hunting

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A number of paleontological data also contradict the hypothesis of the “man-hunter”.

The homo habilis (about 2 million years ago) was a vegetarian. Far more recently, the Neanderthal man (about 100 000 years ago) still maintained a diet consisting mainly of plants. Also rock engravings represent animals which are not generally a source of food. Hunting must then be a relatively recent systematic human practice relatively recent. It's true one can argue that hunting and the consumption of meat may have had selective advantages, in that they favored the increase in brain size, but even if that selective factor occurred (and it is believed today that the increment of the brain's size is mainly due to social interactions), we cannot draw the conclusion that hunting was developed for the purposes of capturing and consuming animal meat. According to another hypothesis with conceptual and empirical support, it is possible that (for a long time) the homo fed himself on the carcasses of dead animals, which, however, represented a rather small part of the hunter-gatherers' diet.

Considering these data, the development of hunting in humans cannot be attributed mostly to utilitarian reasons. Hunting is a cooperative process which probably derived from the emergence of previous forms of cooperation. Following the increasing recognition of the considerable evolutionary importance of intra-specific social relations, it is possible that, in man, hunting was originated in the violence some members of the first primitive communities exerted on one (or even several) other co-specific individuals. This particular kind of hunting, despite its destructive and negative effects, already demanded some form of cooperation. This practice might have evolved into the practice of sacrifice, initially ritualized, on other members of the group, or on a member of a neighboring community. Subsequently, substitution victims were taken from other animal species, requiring a greater refinement of the hunting techniques. The passage to a systematic regime of carnivorous feeding might have been consummated when the species destined for the sacrifice were progressively domesticated. In this hypothesis, hunting was a

substitute of sacrifice and doesn't constitute the fundamental wheel of hominization. This hypothesis receives some indirect confirmation when we consider the rituals of a religious nature, where a certain aliment is consumed in community. Moreover, even today, the hunting performed by man still exhibit, in certain circumstances, the characteristics of the ritual which lies in its origin.